

## Failed Objective

by YappiChick

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Summary: "I wanted to apologize to you directly. For failing my objective." Spoilers for Halo 4 and Spartan Ops, folks.

## Failed Objective

**\*\*A huge thanks to all the reviews, favs and follows for all the stories I've been posting recently. I've got one-shot fever and the only solution is \_moar\_ writing, ROFL. This story takes place after the fourth episode of "Spartan Ops", so there be spoilers.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>The knock at the door tells Catherine that Thorne has picked up guard duty for the day.<p>

A quick glance at the clock shows the doctor that he is nearly three hours earlier than she expected. She wonders if something has happened with the Artifact during the night.

/What do you know of the Prometheans?/

She still doesn't know who contacted her, but she has her theories. Theories that she will perhaps be able to test during today's outing since Thorne affords her more freedom than the other Spartans do.

The doors slide apart. This time, Thorne does not wait outside the door as he had before, but steps inside the cell that houses Catherine. "Doctor," he greets before she is able to stand.

She raises an eyebrow, noting his almost-nervous stance before slowly rising to her feet. No, she thinks, today is not going to be an ordinary day.

"Mr. Thorne," she greets evenly. "What do I owe the pleasure of an

early visit? Does the captain have some new Forerunner mystery for me to solve?"

"No." He shifts his weight. "There is someone here who would like to see you."

Catherine's interest is piqued. For the first few days she was there, she had been a sideshow for the officers stationed aboard the Infinity, but no one outside the Spartans that were assigned to guard her and Captain Lasky were given authorization to speak with her.

"I see," she says evenly. "And ONI has approved of this meeting?"

Thorne hesitates again. Now, she is even more intrigued.

"No, they haven't." He runs a hand through his hair. "In fact, I'm pretty sure they are absolutely opposed to it."

A sinking feeling settles in Catherine's stomach. Now she knows who is outside the doors. She hasn't prepared herself for seeing him. Especially without her.

Thorne continues speaking, unaware of her distress. "The captain, though, he thinks it would be good for you two to see each other."

"Well then, are you going to make the Master Chief stand out there all day while you bluster through your explanation?" Her harsh question disguises the desire -and the dread- of seeing her favorite Spartan.

"How did you-" He stops himself. "Right. I should know by now not to ask you how you figure out things." He takes a step backwards. "The captain is giving you ten minutes."

The doors slide apart to let Thorne out and allow John to step in.

Catherine's breath catches in the back of her throat. Even with the newly upgraded MJOLNIR armor, she can easily identify the man behind the helmet. His purposeful stride, his stance, even the way he looks down at her, tells Catherine that the man in front of her is John.

He walks inside the small cell, stopping several feet from her. His right hand twitches as if he had to keep himself from saluting her. "Ma'am."

"John," she returns.

It seems almost impossible for him to be standing in front of her. She had resigned herself to the fact that she would never see her Spartans -never see John- after she had been placed into prison. But now he is before her, just a meter away.

For a brief moment, Catherine subconsciously waits for Cortana's voice to cut through on his helmet's speakers, reminding the doctor that she was with John too.

But Cortana isn't there. She'll never be there again.

An awkward silence starts to blanket the room before John speaks. He wastes no time on small talk. "I wanted to apologize to you directly. For failing my objective."

Catherine is caught off-guard by the emotion behind John's words. There is a tension to his voice that she hasn't heard in nearly three decades. Not since she saw him at Sam's memorial service.

John is in mourning, she realizes.

"I have seen nothing in your CSV to indicate that you have performed your missions less than exemplary." She offers him a way out of the conversation; she knows her Spartans are not for displaying their emotions in front of people.

She is the same way.

To her surprise, he does not take the bait. He straightens. "I was unable to protect Cor-" The word catches in his throat. "...her."

Despite having been told about Cortana's fate, Catherine is unwilling to accept that her best creation -outside of the Spartan program- was so easily defeated by rampancy. There is something that she is missing, but without access to John's mission logs, Catherine is unable to determine what really happened to Cortana.

"I am sure you did everything you could," she offers. Comfort is never easy for her to give -or receive- but, for John, she would do it.

"It wasn't enough." There is defeat in his voice.

It is clear neither of them are ready for this conversation, yet she doesn't know when -or if- she'll ever get the opportunity to see John again. She pushes the discussion forward.

"Did she suffer?" The question travels through reluctant lips. She had always told Cortana -told herself- that the rampancy process would be painless. She doesn't want to know if she had been wrong.

He flinches, but recovers quickly. "There were some...complications."

An unexpected wave of guilt washes over the doctor. Suddenly, she needs to know the details of what Cortana experienced during her last days. "Such as?" she prompts.

He hesitates, then shakes his head slowly. It is then that Catherine realizes that he isn't going to reveal what happened to Cortana. Was his silence due to a direct order from ONI? Or was there something more personal behind it?

"She completed all of her objectives." Then, more quietly, "She saved my life."

"She took care of you," murmurs Catherine.

"We take care of each other," he quickly replies. She wonders if he noticed his misuse of verb tense. For the first time, Catherine is worried about the man in front of her.

He had fought countless battles, watched as his fellow soldiers -including Spartans- die, and had not broke. But, Cortana's apparent deactivation -her death- caused the man in front of her to be crippled. And now, Catherine knows that he is clinging to the only way of life he has ever known in an attempt to mend himself back together.

She questions whether he is strong enough to do it on his own, wonders if being assigned to the \_Infinity\_ and deployed to Requiem is a wise decision.

He begins to speak again, causing Catherine to be pulled from her thoughts.

"Do you think..." he trails off.

"John?" she prompts.

Another long void of silence fills in room before he asks, "Could you have saved her?" There is a longing -a need- in his voice that must be placated by her.

She considers the question. She had learned never to underestimate Cortana. If there was ever to be an AI who could have found a way to survive rampancy, it would have been her. "I don't know," she says quietly. "But if there was anything I could have done to save her, I would have done it. No matter the consequences."

John tilts his head at her last statement. He turns around, ready to leave the doctor alone.

"John." The Spartan stops and turned back to face her. "I don't blame you for what happened to Cortana. You shouldn't hold yourself responsible either."

He takes a step back towards the door. "I \_was\_ \_responsible\_ for her safety, ma'am."

Then, before she can reply, he spins on his heel, leaving Catherine to ponder just what happened to Cortana and the Spartan had chosen so many years ago.

End  
file.